Heart Palpitations

Signs & Symptoms

Palpitations can be felt in the chest, throat, or neck. With them, it feels like the heart is pounding, racing, and/or fluttering. It can feel like the heart has skipped a beat.

Causes

Most of the time, palpitations are not a serious problem. Common causes include:

- Anxiety. Fear. Stress. Hyperventilation.
- Caffeine. Diet pills. Nicotine. Drugs.
- Exercise.
- Medicines. Examples are beta-blockers, some asthma and cold medicines, and thyroid pills.

Other causes are:

- An **arrhythmia** (heart rate or rhythm disorder).
- **Mitral valve prolapse (MVP)**. This is a heart valve problem. It may be treated with medicine. It is not usually a serious condition.
- **Anemia.** (See at www.HealthyLearn.com.)
- **Hyperthyroidism.** (See at www.HealthyLearn.com.)
- Low blood sugar.

Treatment

Treatment depends on the cause.

Questions to Ask

With palpitations, is any **heart attack warning** sign listed at www.HealthyLearn.com present?   YES ▶ **Get Medical Care Fast**

NO

Flowchart continued in next column

Do any of these problems occur?
- Fainting. Feeling faint or dizzy. Cool, clammy skin.
- Pulse of 150 or more beats per minute.
- New onset of a very irregular heartbeat and a history of a heart condition.
- Within 24 hours, palpitations occur 3 or more times. Each one lasts at least 10 minutes.

YES ▶ **Get Medical Care Fast**

NO

With palpitations, are any of these problems present?
- **Signs of hyperthyroidism** at www.HealthyLearn.com.
- Symptoms persist for hours or days.
- **Heart disease risk factors** at www.HealthyLearn.com.
- A person with an arrhythmia has new or worse symptoms.

YES ▶ **See Doctor**

NO

Use Self-Care

Self-Care / Prevention

- If palpitations occur with exercise, stop the activity. Rest. When you exercise again, gradually increase how long and how intense you do the activity.
- To relieve stress and anxiety, do relaxation exercises.
- Limit or avoid caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol.
- Don't take cold/allergy medicines. Don't take appetite suppressants.
- Call your doctor if rest doesn't help or if palpitations occur again and again.